

Sadia at Temple University of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education Health Information Professions (HIP) Career Pathways Program

In 2004, Sadia Riasat came to the U.S. from Pakistan to begin her married life in a new country. Her English was limited as Urdu was her first language. With time, she had two sons and wanted to pursue a career. She started her studies at home with a study book and CD on property and casualty insurance. As a result of her studies, she got a job in the field and felt acclimated to life in the U.S. once she was employed. Unfortunately, the office in which she was employed closed, and, with her young family, Sadia could not go to school full time nor did she know the direction she wanted to take for the future. She did take a few classes in health information technology at her local community college but was limited by time and finances.

In August 2011, Sadia attended a major job fair at Citizens Park in Philadelphia as she was unemployed. She was not happy with the jobs that were offered. All of the health jobs were clinical, and she did not have the certifications that employers wanted. As she was leaving the elevator, she decided to stop on the second floor to see what was taking place and noticed two presentations. One was on nursing and the other on health careers was led by Susan Thomas of District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund, the HIP program's educational partner. Sadia wanted to know more about health information and followed up with Ms. Thomas. She attended HIP's September orientation and subsequently got accepted and enrolled into HIP's next Tier 1 class. The HIP program is one of 32 Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. When she enrolled, Ms. Riasat was 31 years of age.

Sadia completed her certifications in Tier 1 and did exceptionally well with her course material, but she still was not certain that this was the career path for her. When a presentation was made on Tier 2 and the career benefits of obtaining the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Certified Coding Associate (CCA) certification, she knew that she wanted to be part of that class. She felt excited about being on a true career path, though she was also fearful that she would not get a job as others in the program had more experience than she did.

Sadia has a lot of determination and tenacity, however. Once accepted into the eight-month training which prepares students to test for the AHIMA CCA certificate, she worked diligently. Upon completion of the program, she passed the AHIMA exam and began an internship at Central Billing, Temple University. Sadia did so well that a job was created for her at this site, and she began full-time employment with benefits on January 7, 2013. One of her benefits is tuition reimbursement. Sadia states that she is the first person in her family to have a career and be on a career path, and she is excited about what the future brings. She credits the "great staff at HIP" for helping her with supportive services like transportation, and she felt that the instructor, Dr. Wilbur Lo, was a "great teacher" and very easy to ask for help. Her other plans for the future include moving forward with the educational opportunities available through HIP,

combining credits earned from other colleges, and eventually accessing the HIP Tier 4 program, Temple University's Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management.

**DJ at Temple University
Health Information Professions (HIP) Career Pathways
Program**

DJ was employed at Independence Blue Cross for six years as a Workflow Coordinator in the Adjustment Unit. The company downsized, and her department was cut. She was able to obtain unemployment benefits and continuously looked for employment but was unable to find anything in the field in which she had worked. At the HIP program orientation, she was worried about the TABE test because she had been out of school 30 years, but she passed the test and was accepted into the program. She came into HIP on February 28, 2011, and her training ended July 2011. She worked hard and was one of the top scorers in her class.

DJ completed the program and obtained an internship at Philadelphia Mental Health Center. There she got great reviews and did a lot of medical billing. She thought she would be able to work there upon completion but was disappointed when she was not offered a position. She continued to apply online for jobs, attend job fairs, and network with people from her church.

Her job search, which was conducted onsite four days a week at the HIP program, lasted six months. She became depressed after completing applications, going on first interviews, and not getting call-backs, but she decided that giving up was not an option. The program provided strengths-based counseling that focused on DJ's ties to her religion and offered encouragement, a transportation allowance, and a base of support she could trust.

DJ had an interview with H.T.H. Worldwide, a company that identifies insurance coverage and processes health claims for travelers who are leaving or entering the country. When she informed her career placement coordinators about the interview, she was told to think about the distance (28 miles) and the time and mode of transportation that would be needed to commute (1.5 hours each way by public transportation). She was advised to try to find something closer, but she was determined to work for this company if she could.

She was offered a position with H.T.H. Worldwide and told the position was a temp-to-hire based on her performance over a three-month period. The position as a temp did not offer benefits. She accepted the position because she felt her motivation, dedication, hard work, attention to details, and her communication, computer, and organizational skills would help her perform her job responsibilities. These qualities, among others, were factors that influenced her supervisors to give her a full-time position that offered advancement and full benefits.

DJ has been excited about returning to work and feels gaining employment has made her independent and self-sufficient once again. She believes the skills that she learned from the HIP program, such as medical terminology and abbreviations and health insurance claims forms, helped her obtain and perform her job. She was very appreciative of the resources and incentives earned from her studies with HIP that enabled her to get needed work clothing. Her story is one of someone who, reinventing herself through education and training, opened doors that led to success.

